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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE 4TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE HELD AT CONWAY HALL
RED LION SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.1, ON FRIDAY, SATURDAY AND SUNDAY MARCH
26TH, 27TH AND 28TH - 1948

The General Secretary called the conference to order at 11 a.m.

Chairman - W. Waters
Vice-Chairman - A. Snellgrove.
Tellers - Turner, Hopwood, Clare and Breakey.

REPORT OF THE 4TH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

(3) BRANCHES AND MEMBERSHIP

Items (a), (b), (c) and (d) - No action

(4) PROPAGANDA

(a) Full-time provincial propagandist/organiser etc.

RESOLUTION - Bloomsbury Branch "That in view of our relatively weak financial position, this conference instructs the E.C. not to proceed during 1948 with filling the vacancies of Provincial Propagandist/Organiser and Propagandist/Organiser, but that the position be reviewed in 1949 and reported to the 4th Annual Conference".

Manchester delegate said that the resolution closed the door for at least a year, and they thought that every effort should be made to get a paid propagandist as quickly as possible. S.W. London said that we cannot afford an organiser and if conditions permitted it is presumed that the E.C. would take the matter up again. A previous paid organiser said that the idea of provincial organisation had been in the minds of members for a long time. As a result of his experience he had come to the conclusion that it would be necessary to organise the provinces through the Trade Unions. Members in particular industries should write up their struggles in the Socialist Standard, and by these means we should quickly permeate the Unions with our ideas. It is possible to keep a member on the road with little expense, because if the above method were used we should find large numbers of workers ready for our message. It would take time before we got substantial results. Members in the provinces felt isolated and we should do what we can for them.

The Resolution was carried 58-17.

RESOLUTION - Millon and Billings (Paddington, "That this conference considers that the Provincial Propagandist/Organiser venture was not worth while and that it was ill advised and badly carried out".

Paddington opened by saying that the conference had just turned down a proposal on the grounds of finance, but this was not necessarily the only reason. Part of the party's financial position is probably due to the fact that a large part of party finance had been spent on the venture which we should have known at the beginning was not going to be successful. In any event we cannot now get anyone to do the job. We should not have staked so much on the project. The party had been too optimistic, and had surrounded the position with too many restrictions as to the qualifications required of the organiser. Less ambition on our part would have brought greater success. West Ham asked if the resolution censured the E.C. or the member who had done the job. Another Paddington delegate claimed that the project was premature and the provinces were not yet ready for full-time members. S.W. London said that we have to learn to walk before we run and our real task is the education of party members. At this stage the General Secretary read to the conference a series of reports that had been made to the party over the past few years dealing with the scheme of full-time members. An E.C. member said that conference had been at fault in the first instance in insisting on an organiser and not just a propagandist. Over £1,000 of party money had been wasted. The party, however, cannot grow without paid or unpaid full-time workers. It must be remembered that no-one can work full time in the provinces. He can only speak five or six times a week and members in provincial branches cannot give adequate support. Let us concentrate on propagandists - we need a lot of them. Bloomsbury thought that whatever propaganda had been carried out was worth while, and the provincial branches on the spot had said so. The conference which had instituted the scheme had not been over optimistic, the matter had been discussed at length, and the money for the scheme had been largely specially donated by members and sympathisers. The resolution carried earlier had not been an attempt to get round and get rid of the scheme - it was purely a question of money. When we have the money we should continue the project. The aim of the Paddington resolution was really to restrict provincial propaganda. A previous paid member said that he had been very well satisfied with the results, and the party was now known in many places where it had never been heard of before. He had worked with the secretary of Central branch who had given him lists of members in various areas. If we do not organise the provinces we shall become a sect and move in a circle. We must go to the industrial areas. We must also view the project from the standpoint of the working-class and not just that of the party. Manchester delegate said that the scheme had been very well worth while. Mistakes may have been made but we must learn by experience. What standard of measurement of success could we apply.

His branch had been carrying on propaganda right throughout the season and had lost money on it, but the value of propaganda was not to be judged by financial results. It was difficult to assess the results of propaganda. Tours by London propagandists in Manchester before the war had borne long term results. Edgware thought that the resolution should have been placed on the agenda for discussion by branches before the conference. Behind it was the question of provincial versus London propaganda. Glasgow and Manchester had shown that the effort had been a success. Lack of success was to be found where there was lack of organisation. In winding up the discussion Paddington said that they had held this view for a considerable time. The main fact of the resolution was that this particular project had not been carried out in the best way possible. They were not in favour of a paid post in the provinces but of one in London. There is now no provincial propagandist/organiser and this proves that the venture was not successful - members would have continued to support a successful scheme. In any event the party had not supported a scheme to send organisers to places like Manchester and Glasgow but to places where we were not known. London meetings had helped provincial branches as many provincial workers heard us here. Any future scheme must be gone into very carefully. This one had been handicapped by too much machinery and too many reports. The resolution was lost 9-34.

RESOLUTION - Lustigman and Billings (Paddington. "That when the finances of the party are more favourable, the E.C. should consider the appointment of a full-time speaker in the London area")

Paddington said that it was not a question of London versus the provinces, but how best to get over our propaganda. A full-time speaker would get more support in London than in the provinces, and there were plenty of areas untouched by the party in London.

RESOLUTION - Lawrence and D'Arcy "Next Business" Carried 24-18.

Item for discussion (v) - Croydon. "That the advisability be considered in conjunction with future full-time propagandist appointments of the purchasing and equipping of a small motor vehicle for the purposes of carrying propagandists, party literature etc., wherever the party may wish and "That the party equip a mobile propaganda unit".

We must put the question of full-time members on a more business like basis in the future said Croydon. Organisers in the provinces have the difficulty of getting to out of the way places, carrying platforms around, and keeping with them adequate supplies of literature. S.W. London said we should consider something like the old Clarion vanners - not only propagandists but caravanners as well.

(c) Propagand (General)

RESOLUTION (B) - Croydon branch "That the E.C. be instructed that criticism of the utterances of a party representative at a public meeting shall not necessarily be deemed to be action detrimental to the interests of the Party"

Croydon said that on the surface it appeared sound that members should not attack our speakers at meetings, but what action could be taken if the speaker at an outdoor meeting became flurried by questioners and made a mistake in reply? If he were not corrected members of the audience would have a false impression of what we stand for. When this sort of thing happens members should be allowed to point out to the speaker and the audience that the speaker had been incorrect. Paddington said that they were not in favour of giving members too much leeway on a question like this. In any event there was no party rule on the question. S.W. London said that they were not concerned with any definite ruling, but with the generally accepted definition of party discipline at meetings. They did not oppose members at a meeting saying that the speaker had made an incorrect statement. The danger of mistakes was to the party and not to the speaker alone. The time to correct a mistake is when it is made.

The resolution was lost 23-36.

Item for discussion (ii) - Manchester. "Is party propaganda appropriate to the present political situation?"

Manchester felt that looking at the international situation as a whole there was little of our literature (and also presumably of our propaganda, dealing with the present situation between Russia and U.S.A. It would stimulate interest if this and other vital current topics were dealt with. West Ham said that party propagandists are continually dealing with these questions and knew what they had to approach workers on the current issues of the day. Another Manchester delegate said that they could only judge party propaganda, apart from the work they did in their own area, by examining party literature, and they did not consider that the ground was sufficiently covered in the Socialist Standard. S.W. London said that party propaganda was quite appropriate for the purpose it had in view - the establishment of a socialist system of society. Paddington asked where we could obtain sufficient information to deal adequately with international affairs? Are the facts available? We cannot build articles on sand. This sort of self criticism arises from disappointment with the progress of the party. Hackney wanted to know if we could not take more positive steps in view of the development of atomic warfare. It had been said that 10 atomic bombs could wipe out Great Britain industrially. We must study this in its

proper perspective. We must make a more positive approach to the question of capitalism and war. A manifesto in the form of a leaflet could be distributed giving scientists' views on atomic warfare together with our analysis of capitalism. We must hammer out to the workers the urgency of the situation.

Item for discussion (iii) - Kingston branch. "Payment for entrance to Party meetings".

Kingston said that those organisations which charge an admission fee get very good audiences, while we pay as much as they do for halls without such good results. We charge for our literature - why not for our meetings? If workers pay to come in they will think the meeting must be worth while. Paddington said that party propaganda pays quite well, and it is doubtful if we should get better financial results by charging for admission. How can we compare our support with that received by organisations with large memberships? West Ham said that the only organisation which makes a practice of charging for admission is the Communist Party. They have active members in the Trade Unions who work in the branches persuading members to buy tickets. S.W. London asked the party not to flatter those who did this sort of thing by imitating them. Bloomsbury urged that once we start this sort of idea we immediately exclude some workers from our meetings. The only time other political parties get crowded meetings is at elections. Chamberwell said that up to 80 per cent of our audiences are members of the party, so that by charging admission fees we should be making a levy on members who already contribute to the funds. Let us discuss this question when we have a large number of non-members at our meetings. An E.C. member said that if Kingston question the success of meetings in their own area in relation to the success obtained by other organisations this was due to the fact that Kingston was a new branch and had not yet carried out much work there.

RESOLUTION - Lawrence and D'Arcy (Bloomsbury) "That this conference endorses the past policy of the party with regard to the free admission to all party meetings". Carried nem. con.

Item for discussion (iv) - Kingston branch. "Propaganda to Youth organisations"

Kingston said that there were a number of community centres around London with youth organisations attached to them which ran debates, open forums etc. Our members should join them if their aims were not in conflict with our principles, and we should then be able to get in with our speakers. S.W. London wanted us to use our limited means to the best possible effect. We must guard ourselves against "getting in". Most of these movements have someone behind them and they will get behind us and we will "get out". Islington claimed that it was not true that many of these organisations are run by individuals with ulterior motives and that socialists would be thrown out. There are a number of organisations in which members can play an active part. The delegate gave an account of the useful work played by members of his branch in a mock parliament attached to a youth centre and suggested to branches that they should try and get in touch with their local mock parliaments.

RESOLUTION (C) - Islington branch "That this conference is of the opinion that no useful purpose is served in debating with Fascist organisations and calls upon the E.C. to refuse to sanction debates with such organisations"

Amendment - Lewisham branch "to delete all after 'Fascist Organisations' and insert 'at present, and that the E.C. be urged to continue the practice of judging each case on its merits'".

Islington said that there was very little propaganda value in these debates. Most Fascist organisations now are unsavoury organisations with unsavoury leaders backed by lumpen proletarians. His branch had had one experience when they had an outdoor meeting near a Fascist meeting at Ridley Road. They had a very small audience until the Fascist meeting was closed by the police when a howling mob from this meeting descended upon them. Shortly after their own meeting was shut down by the police. As time goes on the violence is not abated but is growing, and the workers attracted by this sort of thing are not responsive to our ideas. It is true that we held a successful debate with Raven Thompson, but more recently when one of our branches had had a challenge accepted by Mosley the E.C. had refused to sanction the debate on the grounds that there seemed to be little possibility that the debate would be orderly. The only reason the Fascists wanted to debate with us was because they could not get a hall to speak in. When they can get halls they will not want to debate. Leave these people alone and save ourselves from wrecked meetings and violence. Do not let us offer ourselves as instruments by which these thugs can get meetings. Lewisham said that under some circumstances it might be inexpedient to debate with these organisations, but it is undesirable that the party should record on its archives that it is not willing to debate with a particular organisation. The party is opposed to political discrimination and our position would be a difficult one should we record that we were unwilling to debate. Hackney said that during the past summer there had been large crowds coming down to Hackney to listen to Hamm of the Fascists. The majority who came down had not made up their minds and only a few were supporters of Hamm. Our position must be put over to these people. Our debates can be held in an orderly fashion, and this is the only way to combat hoodlums. Edwards asked for a definition of Fascist organisations. All sorts of people are called Fascists - even us. The term "Fascist" has become a political swear word. Let the E.C. judge debates on their merits. The

ideas the Fascist put forward add up to the prejudices held by large numbers of workers, and we should oppose these ideas whenever possible. Other delegates pointed out the difficulty of dealing with the resolution without a clear definition of the term "Fascist". Islington would up by defining Fascist organisations as those which were composed of people who were formerly attached to the British Union of Fascists. The delegate said that Fascists are not interested in discussion, but are merely after halls. Their principle form of propaganda centres on "racial persecution" and they are not political parties in the true sense of the word.

Resolution (C) was lost 4-71

Amendment thereto was lost 36-59

Resolution - C. Lester and J. Lester (Leyton) "That this conference deprecates the unspecified use of the term 'Fascist Organisation'". Lost 2-17.

Resolution - Andrews and Cottis (Southend) "That this conference is of the opinion that the party should be prepared to debate with any political party". Carried nem. con.

(c. Propaganda (General) (Contd.)

Paddington delegate regretted that there was no medium by which party members could thrash out controversial issues amongst themselves. He suggested that meetings should be called for this purpose. These meetings should be run in an informal fashion.

AMENDMENTS TO RULE

Edgware, Hackney, Islington, Kingston and Southend - Rule 2 line 1 - "Delete 'Threepence' and insert 'Sixpence'".

Lost 25-40.

Tottenham branch amendment - "Delete 'sixpence' and insert 'fourpence'".

Lost 25-52.

Southend - Rule 9 line 2 - "Delete 'twopence' and insert 'threepence'".

Lost 5-69.

Edgware, Hackney and Islington - Rule 9 line 2 - "Delete 'twopence' and insert 'fourpence'".

Lost 17-53.

Ealing - Rule 19, lines 2, 3 and 4 - "Delete 'Assistant Treasurer, Assistant Secretary and Literature Secretary'".

Lost 28-36.

Executive Committee - Rule 19, line 4 - "Delete 'Assistant-T Literature Secretary'".

Carried 55-11.

Islington - Rule 23, line 4 - "Insert the word 'only' between the words 'which' and 'shall'".

Islington branch amendment - line 3 - "Delete all from the word 'the' to the word 'shall' on line 4 and insert in their place the following: 'for resolutions and amendments to rules which shall be submitted by branches only and shall....'".

Amendment lost 24-42

Resolution lost without any support.

Item for discussion (1) - Bloomsbury "Should the E.C. have power to put forward amendments to rules at Annual Conference?"

A Bloomsbury delegate opened by saying that in an emergency the E.C. would be justified in taking action and obtaining party sanction afterwards. In the meantime the rule book should be the preserve of the party. Another Bloomsbury delegate stated that there was a precedent in that previous Executive Committees had placed amendments to rule on the conference agenda. The E.C. have the responsibility of carrying out the administration of the party between conferences and in the course of their experience they may come across things that they consider should be dealt with. Some members appeared to have a fear that the E.C. would become leaders. There was no reason for this in an organisation like ours; we had all the democratic safeguards necessary. S.W. London said that members were affected too much by the experience of leadership in Trade Unions. Islington said that the branch is the unit of the party and E.C. members can put forward to their branches any suggested amendment to rule. West Ham claimed that the present rules gave no power to the E.C. to place amendments to rule on the conference agenda. An E.C. member claimed that the E.C. took on itself the status of a branch when submitting amendments, without having any powers from the party to do so. Another E.C. member said that the E.C. did not have to wait twelve months for party decisions. We had a half-yearly Delegate Meeting. A third E.C. member asked what there was against the E.C. doing this. It was better for the E.C. to do it than for an E.C. member to try to persuade his branch to support him.

(9) ORGANISATIONS ABROAD

(a) International Conferences. The Overseas Secretary said that the proposed conference abroad of small organisations which was to be held at Christmas had not materialised and one suggested for this Easter had also been postponed owing to lack of support.

(b) Overseas Secretary's Department. The Overseas Secretary read greetings cables received from the World Socialist Party of the U.S.A. and the Socialist Party of Canada, together with a letter to the Conference from R. Frank of Vienna.

Resolution - R. McLaughlin and H. Cottis "That greetings be sent to all companion parties and socialists abroad". Agreed.

Resolution - H. Collins and F. Lawrence. That the E.C. be asked to hand R. Frank's letter to the Editorial Committee with a view to possible publication in the Socialist Standard". Agreed.

The General Secretary informed the conference that the Executive Committee had received no advice from the U.S.A. party of their intention to change their name from "The Workers Socialist Party of the U.S.A." to that of the "World Socialist Party of the U.S.A." and that he thought that in view of the name selected all companion parties should first have been consulted.

Resolution - D. Moss and E. Ross. "That this conference recommends the E.C. to contact the W.S.P. stating that it is our view that we should have been informed of any change in the name of the latter organisation".

Amendment - Barrass and W. Critchfield "That this conference recommends that whilst the S.P.G.B. have no objection to the W.S.P. changing their name we believe that the change is unfortunate and that it would have been better if all companion parties had been consulted".

Deferring resolution - McLaughlin and Lawrence "That the whole question be deferred pending consideration by the E.C." Carried 42-6.

(8) ELECTORAL ACTIVITY

RESOLUTION (H) - Croydon branch "That this conference instructs the E.C. to defer parliamentary activity until such times as the political understanding of the working class is more in line with the clauses 5 and 6 of the Party's Declaration of Principles: 'That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself' and 'That as the monopoly of government including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and collectively for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic'".

What is Croydon getting at asked Edgware? Have we to wait until we are certain that a large majority of the working class is going to support us? How can we find out if they do support us unless we fight elections? A Bloomsbury delegate said that parliamentary activity did not necessarily mean that the party puts forward a parliamentary candidate. A Birmingham delegate urged that financial reasons alone should be permitted to prevent us putting forward candidates. Manchester supported the resolution. They considered that the whole matter needed thorough examination. Is the working-class sufficiently advanced for us to put forward a candidate? We lost about half the votes we received at the general election when we fought the bye-election at N. Paddington. Our opponents have taunted us with this. After an election campaign party members are exhausted and they cannot carry on the usual party work. Leyton said that during the election campaigns there was a greater feeling of co-ordination and common purpose. The area our propaganda covered during an election was much wider than the constituency. The votes we lost at the bye-election must have been those of workers who did not completely understand our position. S.W. London said that during the election campaigns there was a greater they were not opposed to parliamentary activity, but were opposed to what they considered to be the unwise use of party money and effort. For socialism we had to have socialists, and socialists were not made by putting crosses on voting papers. We know by the membership of our branches how many socialists there are in a particular area. Some members of the party were prepared to do anything to get workers votes. The delegate referred to vote-catching slogans it had been alleged had been used during the campaigns. A Bloomsbury delegate said that elections provided an excellent opportunity for our propaganda. There was no evidence that vote catching slogans had been used. Paddington said that our parliamentary activity in Paddington had been one of our successes. It had spread the party's outlook and we were now prepared to hold meetings in a large hall like the Metropolitan Theatre. It was quite untrue that the party had gone vote catching. Time and time again we told the workers not to vote for us if they did not understand socialism. We received more publicity from our campaigns in N. Paddington than we received during all the previous years of our existence. An E.C. member said that those members who had opposed parliamentary activity during the past few years had been proved to be wrong. The party had not suffered from exhaustion or apathy after the campaigns. The party gained in strength and campaigns had had a considerable stimulating effect on the party membership. The elections had been largely financed by members and sympathisers who supported the idea. It would be a tragedy if the party for financial reasons could not put a candidate or candidates forward at the next general election.

The resolution was lost 15-55

Item for discussion (ix) - Islington branch "The attitude of a socialist M.P. in the House of Commons towards reforms"

The General Secretary submitted a statement of party policy on this issue contained in an answer to a correspondent published in the February 1910 issue of the Socialist Standard. It read:
"W.B. (Upton Park) asks, what would be the action of a member of the S.P.G.B. elected to Parliament, and how would he maintain our principle of no compromise?"

by compromise we understand 'political trading' the only principle for example. The socialist member of parliament (while in the minority, of course) would advance the interests of the working class by enlightened criticism of capitalism in all its manifestations - political, industrial, educational, etc., etc. He would take every opportunity that offered to use this higher and well-heard platform as a means of spreading socialist understanding. His presence, backed as it must needs be, by a wide-awake electorate (suggestive of more to come, and the threatened 'end of all'), would in all probability evoke the initiation by one or other of the capitalist parties, of measures that may conceivably contain some small advantage for the working-class. Now intellectual vitality requires the continual absorption and digestion of new facts as they occur. So with socialism and proletarian politics. The S.P.C.B. is always ready to consider new facts and phases when these present themselves, and therefore the question of whether socialist representatives should support any such measures in parliament, is one that we do not, in January 1910, pretend to answer. We can only say as to this, that as we progress and new situations arise, our membership ever guided by the revolutionary principle of NO COMPROMISE, by our general understanding of socialism and the requirements of the greatest interest of the working-class, its emancipation, will DEMOCRATICALLY direct the action of its representatives. Each new situation, will have to be faced and socialist action be decided upon the merits of the case. Meanwhile we may not claim rank with the Pope or Old Moore, and it should be understood that there is room for difference of opinion upon a matter that, at the present stage, is only of secondary importance. Our work to-day is to teach our fellow toilers their position and show them the indispensable steps they must take to win freedom.

Resolution - LaTouche and Cox (Bloomsbury) "That this conference supports the position of the party on the position of members in the House of Commons as laid down in the February 1910 S.S. and confirmed by party poll in 1911

S.W. London said that socialists are not prepared to give their most powerful weapon, their vote, to anyone for the purpose of carrying out a reform of capitalism. It is therefore illogical for socialists to use their votes in the same way in the House of Commons. Until we have enough M.P.'s to gain control of the governmental machinery, a socialist M.P. should neither support reform or oppose it. Layton claimed that any measure that helps the working-class should be supported by a socialist M.P. Manchester said that a socialist M.P. should use Parliament for the purpose of explaining our position when when reforms are dealt with. Selling said that the membership were not unanimous on this question, and it needed thorough discussion. A socialist M.P. who voted on reforms would be identified with reformist parties. A Bloomsbury delegate said that the conditions in 1910 were very different to the conditions to-day. There were then practical proposals to be dealt with in parliament which could easily be decided upon by socialists. Now capitalism is withdrawing some of the reforms which are in existence. Reforms to-day are generally in the interest of running the capitalist system. A Paddington delegate said that the party would decide whether its M.P.'s supported, opposed or refrained from voting on reforms. There will not be many reforms which a socialist M.P. can support. We should not be compromised by going into the lobby with other parties, as our position would be made perfectly clear before voting. Another S.W. London delegate said that we must judge each proposal on its merits. There might be one day a majority of socialists in this country without a majority of parliamentary seats. If so, we must support a proposal for Proportional Representation. An Islington delegates view was that some members saw no difference between voting for reforms and moving reform measures in the House of Commons. We should also be supported by workers not for our object, but for our reform activity in parliament. Our propaganda meetings would then be largely taken up with discussing our attitude to various reforms. Dartford claimed that by the time we have Socialist M.P.'s the grave of the capitalist class will have been dug for them, and the working class will have realised that reforms cannot help them. Another Bloomsbury delegate said that if a socialist M.P. supports some particular reform measure it did not mean that the party would have to spend a lot of time explaining the position. We could easily issue leaflets giving our position. An E.C. member said that there was not any reason for sending members to parliament in a minority if they could do nothing when they got there. A socialist M.P. must be instructed to oppose war and the granting of war credits. A socialist M.P. would put resolutions in the House of Commons other than the one to abolish the capitalist system. Another E.C. member said that the discussion was a useful one. It is not just a question of what socialist M.P.'s are going to do in the future, but what we are to say on the platform now, and a number of members are muddled on the question. It is a wider question that the manner in which a socialist M.P. will vote. It is a question as to whether a socialist M.P. shall vote on anything except the abolition of capitalism. The reply to W.B. did not mention reforms but dealt with the general attitude of a socialist M.P. The question of war credits is not a reform question. Our position would be illogical if we spoke against war and then refrained from voting against war credits. There are similar issues like military and industrial conscription. We should also have to take a position on things like the wages of government employees. M.P.'s might not be able to speak at all in the House of Commons unless they took up a position on various measures. While capitalists do not introduce reform measures to help the working-class, some measures do indirectly carry with them some benefit.

The Resolution was carried 58-0.

Resolution - Lawrence and D'Arcy "That the statement in answer to W.B. (Upton Park in the February 1910 issue of the Socialist Standard be included in the report of the conference" Agreed.

(5) LITERATURE

Party publications (Distribution. No action)

Party publications (Editorial)

- RESOLUTION (B) - Bloomsbury "That this conference is of the opinion that the price of all party publications should be determined solely by their cost to the party and sold as cheaply as is reasonably possible in relation to this cost. Furthermore, we deprecate any attempt to increase party funds by surcharging on party literature."
- Amendment - Ealing branch "That the price of party publications be left to the discretion of the Executive Committee."
- RESOLUTION (B) - Dartford "That this conference recommends that the selling price of the new pamphlets on 'Race' and the 'Communist Manifesto' be 3d per copy."

Bloomsbury opened by saying that the two new pamphlets cost us just over 5d per copy and the E.C. originally decided to charge 9d for them and then altered their position. We are a propaganda organisation and we restrict our propaganda by surcharging on party pamphlets. A charge of 4d would have been reasonable. We should not aim at making money on them, but rather on losing on them. The conference had already turned down a proposal to increase membership dues. Our present financial position is not due to the low price of literature. The price of a pamphlet influences its sale. 1/- is not a reasonable price for pamphlets which cost just over 5d. We would give literature away if we could afford to do so. Leave this job to the E.C. said Ealing, they can get the advice of committees on it. Another Bloomsbury delegate said that only a small number of pamphlets were sold through wholesale agents, although this point had been mentioned to the E.C. by the Publicity Committee when the price was altered. The General Secretary read to the conference reasons put forward by E.C. members when the price was fixed at 1/-. He said that his personal view was that the only test to apply was whether the price hindered sales, and from information he had received it appeared that the two pamphlets were selling very well. The party were opposed to giving literature away, and in any case any surplus received from the sale of the pamphlets would be used for furthering the party's cause. S.W. London said that there was no precedent for the 85 per cent profit the party were getting from the sale of the pamphlets. The conference ought really to decide what percentage should be charged by the party above cost price. The party is trying to get back money that it has spent unwisely in the past few years, by making a profit on pamphlets. Manchester said that all literature has increased in price and if the workers are interested they will not object to paying 1/- for our pamphlets. Edwards said that while as few obstacles should be placed in the way of workers wanting our literature as possible, it would not be wise to alter the present price of the pamphlets. Manchester said that supporters of the resolution really had other reasons at bottom. Paddington delegate expressed annoyance that the time of the conference had been taken up with a question of the price of pamphlets. "What in any event was a reasonable price?" An E.C. member asked what the position would be if the Bloomsbury resolution were carried? What price would the E.C. have to demand? The price to wholesalers, branches or individual purchasers? An alternative would be for Head Office to distribute literature to branches without allowing them a rebate. A member of the Publicity Committee said that it was always best to have a round figure for the selling price. Wholesalers discount must be taken into consideration, and also the cost of advertising. Bloomsbury wound up by saying that this was a question of party propaganda, and not just that of the price of pamphlets. While the question of what constituted a 'reasonable' price might have difficulties, he claimed that to charge 1/- for a pamphlet costing just over 5d was 'unreasonable'. Five branches had written to the E.C. on this question, and it was therefore a fit item for the conference agenda.

Ealing Amendment Carried 4-27
Resolution (d) Not voted upon
Resolution (B) Lost 4-60

Resolution - D'Arcy and Le Touché "That this conference recommends the E.C. to circulate branches with a view to finding out their attitude regarding the purchase of literature from Head Office at its selling price to the public and report to the Autumn Delegate Meeting." Lost 14-26.

Resolution - Beck and Knogh (Paddington) "That this conference recommends that every effort be made to publish at least a short pamphlet on 'War and the working-class' as speedily as possible."

A member of the Editorial Committee reported that they had just received the script of a pamphlet on "War". The E.C. had also instructed the Editorial Committee to prepare a short pamphlet embodying a declaration of the party's position on war. The resolution was agreed to.

RESOLUTION (G) - Hackney "That a new edition of 'Questions of the Day' be printed."

A member of the Editorial Committee reported that a new edition of this pamphlet is being proceeded with, with certain alterations, deletions etc. It is not yet finished but would not take very long to complete. The main difficulty is the question of paper.

Resolution carried 57-0

Resolution - Andrwe and Cotti "That a short statement on our position on war be inserted in the next edition of Questions of the Day."

A member of the Editorial Committee stated that this chapter was omitted from the previous edition owing to the war situation at the time. The E.C. had agreed that a chapter on war should be included in the next edition.

The resolution was carried by agreement.

Item for discussion (vii) - Kingston branch "Controversial articles in the 'S.S.'"

A Kingston member said that no harm could accrue to the party from the publication of articles upon which members might have divergent views. Paddington thought that controversial articles should be left out of the 'S.S.' at the present time. The articles in the 'S.S.' appeared to readers as the party's point of view, and they might have strong reasons for disagreement with an article's standpoint on a particular issue. If, however, controversial articles are published an opportunity should be provided for the publication of a contrary viewpoint. Bloomsbury deprecated the attack made on a section of the working-class (the doctors) in a recent article. Let us keep controversial articles for publication in an inter-party journal. Edgware said that if these articles were published it should be said in the 'S.S.' that they represent only the writer's views and not those of the party. Another Edgware delegate considered it deplorable that we had had to climb down in the 'S.S.' after publishing a controversial article. Manchester asked for controversial articles of a political character, and not on side issues. West Ham asked the Editorial Committee to take steps to ascertain the correctness of controversial articles. S.W. London said that every article in the 'S.S.' is controversial to somebody. The trouble is that paper limitations do not permit enough space for this sort of thing. A member of the Editorial Committee said that the test applied by his committee for articles for the 'S.S.' is that they do not conflict with the party's position. Provided an article is suitable and does not conflict with the party's position they would publish it even if it contained material which represented only the writer's point of view.

Resolution - Millen and Pack (Paddington) "That this conference recommends that when a suitable material including 'answers to correspondents' is available for publication that the 'Party News Briefs' be discontinued"

Paddington said that the only reason for the 'News Briefs' seemed to be the fact that there was a shortage of articles. A member of the Editorial Committee said that they never had enough material for the 'S.S.' and if the 'News Briefs' were discontinued they would have nothing to replace them. Other delegates who spoke deprecated the idea of abandoning the 'News Briefs' even if suitable articles were available, as readers found them useful and informative. They make the 'S.S.' interesting. The General Secretary appealed to delegates to ask their branches to appoint a member to send in material for the column each month.

The resolution was lost 9-42.

(c) 1947 Delegate meeting recommendation on leaflets.

RESOLUTION (F) - Edgware branch. "That the party endeavour to produce at least every three months a news sheet dealing with items of current interest for free distribution or sale at a low price. Current items to mean any political action which arouses interest among the working class"

In reply to a question a member of the Editorial Committee said that it did not appear that paper would be available for this purpose. Edgware said that two conferences had expressed a wish for this sort of thing and the E.C. had done nothing about it, although branches had sent in suggestions. A member of the Editorial Committee said that they could not get enough material for the 'S.S.' and so their hands are very full. Our first need is for writers for the 'S.S.' Paddington said that the only time the party will be able to publish topical material is when we have our own press and a permanent staff.

Resolution (F) was lost 27-41.

Resolution - Royce and LaTouche (Bloomsbury) "That this conference recommends the E.C. to consider setting up a committee to consider the possibilities of compiling a subject index of articles in the 'S.S.' (e.g. 'War', 'Labour Government', 'Trade Unionism' etc) for use of party members"

It was pointed out that we have an index covering the years since 1932. Bloomsbury wanted, however, an index covering the earlier years. A member of the Editorial Committee said that something more than an index was required. We need files at H.O. of articles under various subject headings. This had been done before but the files were destroyed when our previous Head Office was bombed.

The resolution was lost 8-11.

(d) 1947 Delegate meeting recommendation on literature sales.

Item for discussion (viii) - Ealing branch. "Methods of selling the 'S.S.'"
Smith asked the delegates for suggestions on selling the 'S.S.' Their experience had shown that the door to door canvas by a number of members acting together about once a month was the most successful. They had found a large percentage of returns of 'S.S.' supplied to newsagents.

Resolution - Nicholls and Adams (Palmers Green) "That this conference is of the opinion that a more scientific approach should be made to the selling of pamphlets"

Palmers Green said that we should aim at selling our literature to those who were going to read it. One method is to first interest prospective purchasers in our case and get them to that point where they wish to read the literature. There should be arrangements between branches and speakers at propaganda meetings with a view to particular literature being dealt with from the platform and adequate supplies of it being available. S.W. London said that we should not adopt the approach usually used in selling commodities generally.

The resolution was carried 14-0

Item for discussion (vii) - Kingston branch "Has the time arrived for the issue of an inter party bulletin?" Kingston said that this was not a new idea. It had been done before in the party but difficulties of production had killed it. This journal would arouse interest among party members and the idea of the conference would often be saved as there is a tendency to bring items to the conference which could be discussed among members via an inter party journal. It could also contain 'Party News Briefs'. The earlier bulletin had been restricted to party members but this was not in accordance with party tradition. There is no harm in non-members knowing that party members do not agree on everything. The speaker recognised the difficulties of producing it, such as man-power and the necessity for an editor or editorial committee to select articles. The speaker was asked where the paper was to come from and admitted that this was a difficulty. A Paddington delegate said that members who could write in this journal ought to be writing for the 'S.S.' There was certainly a need for some means of controversy in the party. Perhaps a report of discussions among party members could be taken and circulated. Islington thought the idea an excellent one. Do not let us worry about technical difficulties. Other people who want to bring out publications get the paper somehow. The journal would provide an excellent training ground for writers for the 'S.S.'

(9) FINANCE

No action.

(10) EDUCATION

(c) H.O. Tutorial Class A member of the Education Committee was present who said that the main aim of the class was not merely to provide an educational class for party members, but to provide a permanent, self-perpetuating class for new members of the party, so that when a member joins the party he has an opportunity of getting a grasp of the party's position and history as quickly as possible. A nucleus of tutors is being trained for this purpose. The second session of the class is now in operation, and it has been found that we have about six members who can now take classes along the lines the committee had in mind. The committee are satisfied with the results, as they consider that what they are aiming for takes longer than the production of a number of speakers.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Item for discussion (x) - Camberwell branch. "Industrial action and the party" Camberwell asked how the party stood in relation to industrial activity. According to our pamphlets we support industrial activity when it is in line with working class interests. Why do we make this statement and say no more? We have made no serious move to get in touch with the industrial worker section of the working class. The industrial workers are those who go into the factories, mills, mines etc. The speaker did not ask us to appeal to this section only, and we must not ignore the black coated workers. There has never been a clear line on this issue in the party. The branch were not concerned with the question whether members had trade union tickets or not. If we can get enough workers in the trade unions to come to us they would vote us money for our parliamentary activity. We must know more than the bare party case. We must have members in the party who know enough about trade unions to advise workers what to do in their strikes. In Czechoslovakia the Communists through their activity in the trade unions had been able to dominate the Social Democrats who had control of the state machine. At the moment most trade unions support the Labour Party. Who will they turn to when they become disillusioned? If we do not take our opportunity we shall find that the Labour Party's place will be taken by a far more odious party. The first concrete step we have to take is to realise the need for party influence among industrial unions. Once we have got the support of the trade unionists we shall have really entered the political arena. West Ham said that it is the duty of socialists to do what they can to fight for the working-class. Members of the party have been encouraged to join and take part in trade union activities, but many members of the party gave all their spare time to party work. We have also had members active and prominent in trade union affairs. Some members have opposed trade union activity, claiming the unions to be reactionary bodies, but the party will have to work inside the unions more and more, as the place for socialists is always in the struggle against the capitalist class. Islington said that the difficulty is that workers do not recognise their class position, but are divided by sectional loyalties. In Czechoslovakia the Communists had the largest parliamentary representation and had formed a majority with a section of the Social Democrats. Palmers Green warned against the party being involved in trade union activity as a party. We must work in the unions as individuals. Money from the unions at the present time would be tainted. How can we grow asked Hackney, by any other means than propaganda? Our task is to make socialists, and immediately we talk about the abolition of private property we find the majority against us. Paddington said that party members were playing their part in union activity, and the speaker's remarks arose from his disappointment with the progress of the party. Another Paddington delegate said that what Camberwell really wanted were the things that the Communists and Trotskyists tried to do. Bloomsbury said that approximately 50 per cent of Trade Unionists were not industrial workers as defined by Camberwell. What concrete suggestions had Camberwell got? Trade Union action is action aimed at gaining wage increases and defending existing standards. A member of the party joins a union for the same reason as non-members, i.e. to protect his living standards. Workers on strike are not interested to listen to socialist propaganda. Party members in trade union are quite capable of dealing with situations as they arise without guidance from the party. The political struggle is the crystallisation of the economic struggle. Dartford said that the number of workers who are active in their trade unions form an insignificant minority, and we should not divide the working class into two sections, unionists and non-unionists.

Islington argued that in 1907 the 'S.S.' had said that trade unions will be necessary for the establishment of socialism. We now say that political action only is necessary. Members should not hesitate to take up positions in trade unions. Hackney said that 95 per cent of their members were trade unionists, but none of them were enthusiastic supporters of the possibility of spreading our ideas in their branches. As soon as politics are introduced into trade unions their effectiveness is reduced. We should examine the present tie-up of the unions with the state machine. An E.C. member said that the question introduced by Camberwell branch was not a question of the party's attitude to trade unions. The real basis of their item was defeatism arising from disappointment with the party's p. o. g. r. a. m. The only way to get into the trade unions is to drop socialism and talk on the political level of the majority of trade unionists. It was impertinent and incorrect to infer that the work put in by party members had been without result. It is better for members not to be active in trade unions because their activity would prevent them carrying on socialist work. Newport said that they had circularised 42 trade union branches in their area and had received three replies only - all non-committal. Camberwell would up by saying that if the party is to be successful we must remake our propaganda in the light of the problems facing the working-class. There were political issues in the trade unions on which members must take up a position. It is our duty to get our case over to the workers in whatever way we can. The influence of the Communist and Labour parties will wane in the trade unions soon, and we can make our approach into the Trade Union movement.

Resolution - Lawlor and Chalk (Camberwell) "That this conference urges the E.C. to publish a pamphlet on Trade Union". Agreed.

(7) PUBLICITY

(b) General Publicity

RESOLUTION (I) - Hackney branch "That the party have permanent posters printed advertising the 'S.S.' for newsagents display boards"

Resolution (I) carried 53-12.

MISCELLANEOUS RESOLUTION

RESOLUTION (J) - Islington branch "That this conference instructs the E.C. to set up a permanent committee of members familiar with the trade union movement to co-ordinate the work of the party in this sphere" Islington said that we need members conversant with trade union work to deal with issues as they arise, particularly for writing up strikes etc. in the 'S.S.' and to arrange for lectures in trade union branches. A member of the Editorial Committee said that we do not need a committee but for members engaged in disputes to write them up for the 'S.S.' Resolution (J) was lost 25-37.

Resolution - Cox and LaTouche (Bloomsbury) "That this conference recommends the E.C. to hold several rallies in Hyde Park to publicise party literature with special emphasis on the 'Communist Manifesto'". It was pointed out that we were not permitted to advertise literature in Hyde Park.

The resolution was lost 10-20.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Items for discussion (xi) and (xii) - Islington and Ealing branches.

"The attitude of the party to price control" and "Rent and price controls" Islington said that the pitting of price controls at the moment would cut down the living standards of the workers. Some members thought that if prices went up it would encourage the workers to be more militant and strike to obtain higher wages. The party should sometimes come out and make a definite stand on things happening in the world to-day. Ealing said that rent and price controls help the capitalists more than anyone else. Paddington asked if price controls really control prices. It is not an issue for the working class as a whole. Price controls benefit workers with fixed incomes. To support controls means to support one section of the workers against another. Bloomsbury said that if we agree with price controls we must also agree with wage controls. If controls were removed the working class would win through strike action. Islington replied that there is nothing mechanical about wages immediately following prices. It is a question of trade union action. It can be argued that wages do not catch up with prices, and they only level out over a long period. If price controls were removed in time of shortage the workers would be at a disadvantage.

Item for discussion (xiii) - Islington branch. "The attitude of the party to inflation".

We have so far had no authoritative statement from the party on this, said Islington, and the branch put it on the agenda for the purpose of clarifying the position. A member of the Editorial Committee said that it might be useful to have this written up for the 'S.S.'. It had a direct bearing on the previous items for discussion. Governments do not stabilise prices, but stabilise the cost of living index which is a different thing. Governments further allow inflation in order to get over some of their problems. The relation of the pound sterling and the dollar to gold had been altered by government action. This had the effect of raising prices, and from the Government's point of view they preferred this method rather than fighting with the trade unions over wages. Government's also have a huge burden of debts which they can reduce by permitting prices to rise and thus paying in pounds of less value. If we look at the history of wages over a number of years we find that they closely follow changes in the cost of living. Our point is that we are not in favour of deflation, inflation etc. etc. but against the capitalist system. Islington

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replied that if high or low prices were immaterial was it not also the case that high or low wages make no difference? We cannot consider prices in the long run, but have to deal with fluctuations as they occur.

Item for discussion (xiv) - Islington branch "The attitude of the party to the transitional period."

Islington said that many workers who are not socialists consider that there is some transitional period between capitalism and socialism. We do not link up this idea with the policies of the Communist party in discussion. Paddington replied that the whole question had been amply covered by articles in the 'S.S.' and by our speakers.

Resolution - LaTouche and E.Rose "That the report of the 44th E.C. be adopted" Agreed.

The Conference terminated at 5.30 p.m.

(signed) C.C.Groves.....General Secretary.

29th March 1948.

- 1st day 60 delegates representing 23 branches.
- 2nd day 63 delegates representing 22 branches.
- 3rd day 61 delegates representing 23 branches.

Exelos and Bradford branches were not represented during Conference.